

Today I co-chaired a meeting of the Iran Working Group, a bipartisan caucus I started three years ago with Rep. Rob Andrews (D-NJ) to educate the Members of Congress and staff on Iran issues. The briefing today focused on Iran's worsening human rights record. Our speaker, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Barry Lowenkron, gave a sobering account of the Iranian government's persecution of minorities. The target of the most vicious state-sponsored discrimination is not the Christian or the Jewish population, but rather the 350,000-strong Baha'i community. The mullahs in Iran imprison Bahá'ís for crimes such as "creating anxiety in the mind of the public and Iranian officials." They foster an atmosphere of impunity by refusing to punish those who beat, steal from, or desecrate the graves of the Iranian Bahai. There is even talk of laws which would force Bahá'ís to wear identification badges - reminiscent of Hitler's actions towards Jews in the 1930's. I agree with Assistant Secretary Lowenkron that we must do more to protect religious freedom and the rights of minorities in Iran. I introduced bipartisan legislation, House Concurrent Resolution 415, which condemns Iran for their persecution of Bahá'ís. As a member of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, I will continue to work with my colleagues to give a voice to those have none.